I thank the distinguished chairman.

Our uniformed men and women have given great service to the Nation by

ending a tyrant's rein and fostering elections in a region that only

knew dictatorship. In my judgment now, the time for decisive military

action led by American and British forces is ending and the Iraqi stage

should be delivered to new political leaders to work out their own

differences. I will support the House resolution that recommends

against the troop surge because the United States should increase the

responsibilities of the elected Iraqi government to solve its own

problems while reducing the number of American combat troops sent

overseas.

I did not come to this conclusion lightly. The long-term security of

our country depends on the United States not being defeated in the

Middle East. To prevent the collapse of democracy, tolerance and

supporters in our region, we need a policy that relies on America's key

strengths and builds additional support among our citizens and allies.

Looking back on the last years, our troops in Iraq achieved two major

objectives: First, they ended the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, a

leader that

invaded two separate United Nations member countries and ordered the

murder of several hundred thousand Iraqis. Second, they backed the

United Nations' sponsorship of Iraq's three national elections that

approved a new constitution and government.

Iraq is no longer a military threat to her neighbors or minorities,

especially her Kurdish families, who no longer fear that a third

genocide campaign will be launched by their very own government. These

are major achievements, worthy of the bravery and sacrifice of

Americans in uniform.

But Iraq now faces new challenges that should be solved by Iraqis,

not the U.S. military. Iraq's government, led by a Kurdish president

and a Shia prime minister, faces a daunting enemy composed of people

that would restore the old dictatorship, or worse. But this struggle is

primarily political, not military. Foreign troops, be they American or

British or otherwise, are not well-suited to advance the elected

government's writ.

In the coming months we should build a longer term plan for the

United States and our allies in the Middle East. Man for man, Iraqi

combat troops operating under the authority of their own elected

government are better suited for this mission than Americans on the

front lines of Iraq.

The U.S. military can offer unique advantages to the Iraqi government

in our ability to provide the Iraqi army and police with logistics,

communications, training and intelligence, in a way that only Americans

can provide. Over the coming months, Americans should be focused on

these missions, making sure that our Iraqi allies are more effective in

extending the authority of their government. By winding down the combat

duties of Americans, we will dramatically lower the risk to our men and

women stationed overseas while providing a decisive advantage to the

elected government of Iraq. This is how to win the battle and secure a

lasting government for the Iraqi people.

Our plan should be strengthened by a diplomatic initiative among

Iraq's neighbors and the World Bank to support the elected government

in its plans for reconstruction. To date, the World Bank has been

``absent without leave'' in delivering help to this founding member of

the International Bank For Reconstruction and Development.

Our efforts, based on the key American advantages, while reducing the

number of American combat troops, will improve the prospects for peace

and build support for our goals here and among our allies.

Mr. Speaker, I join with many Members today to say if it were up to

us, we would recommend a different course of action that involves less

risk to Americans. As a military man, I am fully aware that the

Constitution does not place 535 Members of Congress in the direct

military chain of command, and Americans who wear the uniform are also

not shy in debating various courses of action. They have as many

opinions on various issues as any civilian community, and that is their

birthright as Americans. But as volunteers who wear the uniform, they

take on an additional heavy obligation to make a decision, to bring an

end to the debate, and to confront the enemies of the United States as

brothers and sisters united by a common bond.

In coming days, our troops will face danger, not as Democrats,

Independents or Republicans, but as Americans.

We in Congress should draw on their strength once our decision is

made. When a course of action is set, we are not neutral in the

contest. If Americans are engaged in combat, we are for the Americans

winning. We will give them the tools to bring an end to the conflict as

rapidly as possible. The debate in Congress will soon close and the

course will be set. For those Americans who serve farthest from home,

they should know that after a vigorous debate, their democracy will

make a decision, and we will back those charged with its implementation

with everything needed to succeed.